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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA: ANC WILL DOMINATE LIMPOPO DESPITE
WATER DELIVERY CHALLENGES

REF: A. 05 PRETORIA 4585

[B](#). 06 PRETORIA 347

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. The residents of Waterberg and Vhembe District Municipalities in Limpopo live with high levels of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to public services. Despite frustrations, the electorate stands behind the ANC and will vote overwhelming for them in the March 1 local elections. Some residents will abstain from voting or vote for opposition parties, but this will not have much impact on the election outcome. A recent protest did occur in the Waterberg region against local government, but political undertones instead of service delivery appeared to drive this unrest. Local government considers housing and electricity delivery areas of relative success given the challenges faced. Water delivery remains the central crisis facing local government, as water is critical to the livelihood of its population and the region's economic growth prospects. End Summary.

Background

[1](#)2. (SBU) This cable is part of a series of cables reporting on public service delivery and the mood of the electorate in advance of local elections on March 1. Team members, including Embassy, Consulate, and USAID personnel, visited diverse municipalities in all nine provinces. Refs A and B served as background pieces surrounding the local elections and service delivery nationwide. This cable provides a summary of February visits by EconOff and PolAsst to municipalities in the Limpopo province. Municipalities visited included the Waterberg and Vhembe District Municipalities and their Local Municipalities of Mookgophong (Waterberg), Bela-Bela (Waterberg), Thulamela (Vhembe), and Makhado (Vhembe).

Poverty and Unemployment Permeates in Limpopo

[1](#)3. (U) Hundreds of villages comprise the northern province of Limpopo, which shares borders with Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. The provincial capital of Polokwane and a variety of small towns link these scattered villages. As you drive throughout the province, the primary economic activities of farming, mining, and tourism become evident. This economic activity is not enough, however, to combat the

high unemployment and poverty in the region. In the Waterberg District Municipality, over half its 600,000 residents live in poverty and the official unemployment rate is 31%. The unofficial unemployment rate, which excludes those who have stopped looking for work, is almost certainly higher. Waterberg residents, including the Tswana, Basotho, and Bapedi ethnic groups, are scattered across an area of 44,000 square kilometers, roughly the size of The Netherlands. The Vhembe Municipality is less than half the size of Waterberg, but has twice as many people as well as higher poverty and unemployment levels. Vhembe's 1.2 million residents, primarily from the Venda ethnic group, endure an official unemployment rate that is over 50%. Over 60% of Vhembe residents live in poverty.

ANC Will Dominate; Voter Turnout Should Be Lower

14. (SBU) The ANC should win an overwhelming number of the municipal councilor seats in the March 1 election. The ANC has historically dominated the Waterberg and Vhembe Municipalities of Limpopo, with 80%-90% of the electorate supporting the party in the last elections. The Mayor of Makhado (Vhembe) even seemed slightly embarrassed of the prospect that the opposition might not win any seats at all. The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) are the only other parties likely to attract a share of the votes. Other political parties that have a presence in the area are the United Democratic Movement (UDM), Independent Democrats (ID), Freedom Front, and local Shangaan parties in the eastern portion of Vhembe. Many of those who were not chosen as ANC candidates are running as independents. Local leaders and residents did not

PRETORIA 00000844 002 OF 004

predict, however, that independents will win many seats, if any.

15. (SBU) Overall, the mood of the electorate was mixed, with some residents clearly frustrated and unsure if they would vote, and others more positive and staunchly behind the ANC. Most local politicians were optimistic that voters would turn out to support them. Other leaders were more candid, admitting that a lower turnout could reflect frustrations with local government and voter apathy. Some residents reportedly plan to boycott the elections or vote for opposition parties, most notably youth groups and others who do not approve of the ANC candidate selection process. A voting boycott movement has been rumored to have garnered support in the Waterberg Municipality.

Local Government Complaints

16. (SBU) Many residents questioned the effectiveness of current municipal councilors. These residents complained that they have little contact with their municipal councilors and that they were only getting to know them during the election campaign. The Vhembe Mayor explained that some councilors have to balance a full-time job, such as school principal or nurse, with their municipal duties, but admitted that contact with residents could be improved. To combat this image, most of the municipalities visited were working to improve local government's communication with its residents by improving their ward committee operations, coordinating with traditional leaders, and holding imbizos (community meetings). This effort has kept relative stability in the area, while other provinces have been faced with unrest. Local leaders have found that once the challenges to service delivery are explained, most residents seem to understand and support their efforts.

17. (SBU) One exception to the province's stability was a recent protest in the Bela-Bela Township of Waterberg. Residents burned tires and dust pans in the streets to protest against local government, ostensibly for selling land

with an informal settlement on it to a white man. EconOff was told that bulldozers later cleared out the informal shacks that were on the land. The police dispersed the protesters, allegedly led by young communist party members, with rubber bullets. In Mookgophong (Waterberg), another youth group submitted a petition to protest, but local government denied the request.

Relative Successes: Housing and Electricity

¶8. (SBU) The Vhembe and Waterberg Municipalities claim housing and electricity delivery as relative successes. In Vhembe, less than 3% of households do not have formal housing (i.e., they live in a temporary shack), making it one of the ten best District Municipalities in housing delivery. About 15% do not live in formal housing in Waterberg, but this is still lower than many other municipalities in South Africa. In Thulamela (Vhembe), 16,500 houses have been built since ¶2000. In Makhado (Vhembe), they have built 9,000 houses since 2000. One factor working in Limpopo's favor is that in the rural areas land is more abundant and people are accustomed to providing their own housing. Therefore, rural residents do not demand or wait for government-provided housing as they do in urban areas. The varied and larger than average houses that you see in rural Limpopo provide testimony for this factor, specifically in the Vhembe Municipality.

¶9. (SBU) Informal squatter camps are an issue closer to the more urban areas, especially along the N1 highway that runs from Pretoria to Zimbabwe. Immigrants from Zimbabwe as well as other African countries live in many of these communities. Municipal governments have given priority attention to building houses for these informal households, but this will only apply to those who are South African citizens. Waterberg plans to build 1,000 houses this year and an additional 1,000 the next year in an effort to reduce the size of its informal squatter camps.

¶10. (SBU) The Vhembe and Waterberg Municipalities have not been as successful with electricity delivery as housing, but

PRETORIA 00000844 003 OF 004

have still made some strides given their challenges of servicing hundreds of rural villages. About 35% of households remain without electricity in Waterberg, while about 39% of households lack electricity in Vhembe. In Makhado (Vhembe), they have electrified 45,000 households, but a backlog of 30,000 to 35,000 households still exists. This backlog includes only 26 villages out of the 280 total villages in the municipality. In Thulamela (Vhembe), 168 of 438 villages need to be electrified. Community savings programs are in process to meet this need. These programs involve households saving R1,000 (\$165) to donate collectively so that their house can be hooked up to the electricity grid.

Water Delivery Problems Loom

¶11. (SBU) Water delivery problems loom large in Limpopo and are the central concern among local leaders and residents. Hundreds of villages are scattered about the rural and mountainous landscape, making it difficult to stretch services to all areas. The water infrastructure that does exist is old and lacked proper maintenance for a number of years. Currently, about 32% of Waterberg households and 41% of Vhembe households do not have piped water within 200 meters of their homes. For these reasons, Limpopo is not likely to meet comply with national government's goal of delivering water to all households by 2008.

¶12. (SBU) Currently, boreholes are the primary source of water in many areas, which inconsistently provide a water supply. Many residents have to walk for miles to get water

or are fetching water from local streams. In addition, certain residents that operate the boreholes charge other residents for the water they use. The quality of water is also an issue, as the Thulamela area of the Vhembe Municipality did suffer a recent cholera outbreak.

¶13. (SBU) Many municipal leaders spoke of needing a reliable water supply to ensure economic growth. Mining exploration in the Waterberg Municipality has been restricted by water constraints and the Makhado Municipality (Vhembe) struggles to supply a growing Air Force base in the area. Local government lacks the resources to implement a plan quick enough despite its dedication to fix the water problem. Dams in the area provide plentiful sources of water, but the main obstacle is upgrading and building the infrastructure to deliver the water to all areas. For example, the Makhado Municipality spoke of a five-year plan to put this infrastructure in place; however, the municipality faces this challenge without a civil engineer on their staff.

Other Challenges

¶14. (SBU) A myriad of other challenges face municipalities in Limpopo. Roads, education, financial management, health, land reform, and sanitation issues to name a few:

-- Roads. Most village roads are not paved and are in poor condition, especially since the heavy rains of the current summer.

-- Education. Less than 15% of Limpopo residents over the age 20 have a grade 12 education. Many children are instructed under trees, as proper classrooms have not been built.

-- Financial Management. Rate collections are poor and the pace of budget spending is slower than desirable. New billing systems have been implemented at the District and Local levels in Vhembe.

-- Health. Established clinics and hospitals operate in most communities, but they lack the trained staff to deal with the workload. Funeral parlors continue to spring up around the region as a result of increased deaths caused by HIV/AIDS. In Makhado, the Mayor stated that they lose two to three municipal employees a month from AIDS.

-- Land reform. Most farms in the municipalities visited were white owned. Blacks do own some farms as a result of land reform, but the land restitution and redistribution

PRETORIA 00000844 004 OF 004

process continues. Local leaders were mostly positive about this process and did not foresee major problems in this area.

-- Sanitation/Refuse Services. The municipalities visited have mostly ignored the delivery of sanitation (i.e., flush toilets) or refuse removal services at this point. About 60% of Waterberg residents are living without sanitation services, while 80% of Vhembe residents suffer the same fate. Municipal governments have chosen to focus on the basics of water, electricity, and housing, which means that residents will be using bucket or pit toilets and taking care of their own trash for awhile.

Comment

¶15. (SBU) Many residents in the Vhembe and Waterberg Municipalities are living without basic services, but are peacefully at odds with their local government. Residents are critical of their local leaders and pace of service delivery, but are not ready to abandon their loyalty to the ANC government. If local government can overcome its

capacity constraints, communicate with its citizens, and make steady progress on its service delivery challenges, the ANC should remain dominant in this region for years to come. If the ANC cannot deliver on its promises in the future, the door could open slightly for the opposition to increase its influence.

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